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Impact of Customer Attire on Price of Goods and the Service Quality in Small and Medium Scale Business Context

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The present study tests the impact of customer attire on service quality, quoted price of goods, and pressure to purchase in small and medium scale textile businesses in the Kandy area. The study seeks to identify the salesperson's initial categorization of customers using their attire. The study also seeks to establish the relationship between dress style and service quality, quoted price for goods, and pressure to purchase. The theoretical basis of the research was provided by Bitner's Servicecape Model and the SERVQUAL Model. The research was done in two steps. In the initial stage, face-to-face interviews were conducted with sales employees in small and medium scale textile shops. The study found that the sales employees categorize the customers using their attire with respect to quality and style of the dress, shoes, hand bags and hairstyles. The second stage of the study was designed as a within subject experimental design, in which mystery shoppers visited textile shops in the three different appearances (sloppy, clean and tidy casual, fashionable). Mystery shoppers completed structured questionnaires for every visit. Three hypotheses were tested using a repeated measures ANOVA and *post hoc* comparisons. Supporting the research hypotheses, dress had significant effects on sales employees' decisions on level of service quality, pressure to purchase and price quoted. Customers wearing branded and fashionable or clean and casual clothing received better service and encountered higher pressure to purchase than those dressed sloppily, while the sloppy customer was offered lower prices. The results contribute to the understanding of how customer segmentation occurs in small and medium scale retail environments where prices are unfixed.

Keywords: customer attire, service quality, price quoted, mystery shopper

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